

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 14, 2006

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales
U. S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Secretary Mike Leavitt
U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Attorney General Gonzales and Secretary Leavitt:

We are writing to encourage you to fully fund programs addressing domestic and sexual violence in the FY 2008 Budget. Last year, Congress reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 (VAWA), which continues successful and lifesaving programs, while also taking the next steps to end sexual and domestic violence. We applaud the Administration's continued support of critical VAWA programs that help our nation better respond to the needs of victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. We encourage you to continue this support by fully funding the VAWA programs (including the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act) in the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services in the FY 2008 Budget.

As you know, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking are crimes of epidemic proportions, exacting terrible costs on individual lives and our communities. Nearly 25 percent of U.S. women report that they have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner during their lifetimes, 1 in 6 have been the victims of attempted or completed rape, and the cost of intimate partner violence exceeds \$5.8 billion each year.

Recent studies indicate that domestic violence has begun to decline since VAWA was first authorized, yet more work remains to be done. Studies also demonstrate that VAWA is more than good social policy, it is good fiscal policy – VAWA 1994 saved nearly \$14.8 billion dollars in net averted social costs in its first 6 years. VAWA 2005 has been crafted to continue the success of VAWA of 1994 and 2000, by bringing together existing resources to create new collaborations that efficiently deliver services to victims. VAWA is working to break the cycle of violence, but to see further savings, both in lives and in dollars, VAWA programs in the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services must be fully funded in the FY 2008 Budget.

As successful programs reach more victims of domestic and sexual violence and prevent further costly and devastating crimes against them, the demand for services has consistently risen. Increased training for police, prosecutors, and court officials has greatly improved the criminal justice system's response to victims. These programs have been so successful that many more victims are now referred for services and demand has steadily risen for emergency shelter, hotlines, legal assistance and support services. Since VAWA 1994 there has been a 51% increase in reporting of domestic violence.

Continued efforts are needed to address victims' needs and to stem the tide of violence:

- 70% of victims lack legal representation. Funding for civil legal assistance and support for victim assistance in criminal justice systems funded by VAWA ensures that victims have access to and are not re-victimized by either the civil or criminal justice systems.
- STOP (Services, Training, Officers, Prosecutors) grants are the single largest source of funds for states to respond to domestic and sexual violence. According to a national evaluation, 44% of STOP grant recipients added new victim services; 64% enhanced or improved existing services; and 79% reported offering services to victims who would not have received services without STOP funding. This program needs increased funding to meet the continued need and to replace funding that has been directed to earmarks.
- According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, forcible rape is the only violence crime to show any increase from 2003 to 2004. VAWA 2005 makes changes to better address the needs of sexual assault survivors.
- American Indian and Alaska Native women are battered, raped and stalked at far greater rates than any other group of women in the United States. VAWA 2005 recognizes the exceptional needs of Tribal communities.
- The complexities of addressing violence against women within Communities of Color are vast and intersect with many other issues. In response, VAWA 2005 addresses the culturally specific needs of Communities of Color.
- Women with disabilities and women in later life are more likely to be the victims of abuse and violence than other women because of their increased physical, economic, social or psychological dependence on others. VAWA 2005 continues successful efforts to address violence against these vulnerable populations.
- More than 50% of homeless women and children are homeless because they are fleeing domestic violence, and 38% of all victims of domestic violence will become homeless at some point during their lives. VAWA 2005 seeks to increase safe housing options, so that fewer families face homelessness after they leave emergency shelters.
- Over 8.8 million children witness domestic violence in the home each year; girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence; and, over half of all sexual assaults reported to law enforcement are minors. VAWA 2005 addresses the needs of children who witness violence and works to support youth who are already experiencing violence in their own relationships. In addition, it recognizes that we must engage men and youth in preventing domestic and sexual violence and raise awareness through increased public education efforts.

- Between one quarter and one half of domestic violence victims report that they have lost a job due, at least in part, to domestic violence; and almost 50% of sexual assault survivors lose their jobs in the aftermath of the crime. VAWA 2005 supports businesses and employers who are responding to the needs of victims in the workplace.
- In 2004, over a quarter of a million women and children were turned away from domestic violence shelters due to lack of available resources. Funding for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act program is critical to meeting the need for lifesaving services including emergency battered women's shelters, crisis lines, counseling, victim assistance, and programs for underserved communities.
- Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) funds cost-saving efforts to stop sexual violence before it starts. In 2002, grantees provided more than 3 million school and community educational seminars. Increased funding for RPE is needed to provide crucial support to programs working to end sexual violence in their rural, suburban and urban communities.
- VAWA 2005 creates new partnerships with health providers, who are uniquely positioned to reach victims of domestic and sexual violence, and increase their health and well-being.

To continue the progress toward ending domestic and sexual violence, our nation must invest in these new directions, while sustaining successful programs. VAWA 2005 continues the lifesaving core services created by VAWA 1994 and 2000, and extends these efforts with targeted, innovative new programs.

In FY 2008 the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services have an exciting opportunity to continue the Administration's strong commitment to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking and make additional gains through the new targeted, efficient VAWA programs. We urge that you support full funding in the FY 2008 Budget for programs that address these crimes, provide needed services for victims, and prevent future violence. Full funding for VAWA is a crucial investment in our communities that will save lives, prevent future crimes, and result in reduced costs.

Sincerely,



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Co-Chair
Victim's Rights Caucus



JIM COSTA
Co-Chair
Victim's Rights Caucus



KATHERINE HARRIS
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cc: Rob Portman, Director, Office on Management and Budget

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